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Ethnology of Easter Island

By Alfred Métraux
Bernice P. Bishop Museum Fellow, 1936-37

INTRODUCTION

Most of the material published in this monograph is the result of field work that I carried out as a member of the Franco-Belgian Expedition to Easter Island (1934-1935). First plans for this Expedition were conceived by the Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris and by the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris. The Belgian Government and scientific institutions gave their support to this enterprise which became a joint undertaking by the two countries. The Expedition was originally composed of Mr. Charles-Louis Watelin, French archaeologist, Dr. Henri Lavachery, Conservatuer aux Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, Dr. Israel Drapkin, Chilean physician, and me. Mr. Watelin died at sea in the Patagonian channels on the way to Easter Island.

The French Navy transported the members of the Expedition to Easter Island aboard the man-of-war *Rigault-de-Genouilly* which was then making a cruise from France to Indo-China. We returned to France aboard the Belgian training ship *Mercator*. The writing of this volume was made possible through a Bishop Museum Fellowship that enabled me to come to Honolulu and to work up my material at Bishop Museum.

Conditions for anthropological research on Easter Island are especially distressing. I know of few places in the Pacific where so little remains of the ancient culture. The rare traditions that linger in the memory of a small group of natives have been recorded over and over again by visitors to the island. The present population of 456 natives is entirely derived from the 111 natives left after the abandonment of the island by the French missionaries in 1872. This single fact shows how little chance exists for the preservation of old traditions. Viriamo, the mother of my informant Tepano, is the only living person who witnessed the functioning of the ancient culture. As she is over 100 years old and her memory is uncertain, she was of little help in my inquiries.

My chief informant was Juan Tepano who, although about 60 years of age, is the oldest man on the island. He speaks fluent Spanish, having spent seven years in Chile. He was Mrs. Routledge's interpreter and has retained from that contact a keen interest in the past. He is intelligent, quick, and proud of his reputation as the *maori* in the old folklore. When other natives are asked about their ancestors they always refer to Juan Tepano. The information that I received from others was generally attributed to him. If Tepano reads these

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[pp. 1 & 2 have no textual material]

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caves, where they lived in great discomfort and constant anxiety, neglecting the cultivation of their fields. 175

At the request of Mgr. Jaussen, representation was made to the Peruvian government by the French minister in Lima. The British government backed France in demanding justice for the enslaved islanders. Orders were given to assemble the blackbirds at Callao so that they might be sent back to their homes. Tuberculosis, smallpox, and the change of living conditions and climate, together with unsuitable food and the hardships of guano digging on the barren islands off the Peruvian coast had killed about 900 natives in less than one year. Before the surviving 100 could be put on board ship, many of them contracted smallpox and 85 died before the end of the journey. Only 15 were landed on the island, and they carried with them the infection of smallpox, which in a very short time decimated the rest of the population. The casualties caused by the epidemic are said to have been in the thousands (64, pp. 256-257). Zumbohm (230, vol. 5, p. 662) adds: "The inexperience of the natives, the lack of remedies, their imprudent practices, all increased the number of victims to such an extent that they were unable to bury them." 648 175 648 731

During these few years the native culture crumbled; the old racial order was destroyed, the population reduced to one third or one quarter of its size, and the transmission of the religious and moral traditions was suddenly interrupted. Internecine wars completed the island's ruin. Zumbohm (230, vol. 5, p. 662) writes: 175 178

> The former inhabitants of the island had left rather good plantations. Those who remained had an easy living and indulged in their natural laziness, not caring to insure their future by working. But when they came to the time to share the products of the fields, quarrels arose which rapidly degenerated into dangerous wars. These fights brought waste and plundering and consequently starvation. That is why the population decreased so rapidly. 175 178 181

Ollivier (165, vol. 39, p. 257) alludes to this period of anarchy and misery in the following terms:

> The mortality caused by misery and famine is increasing rapidly. The plantations have been plundered and they give scarcely any sweet potatoes, which these unhappy people eat half raw. It must be added that laziness and carelessness make their situation even worse. It is necessary for some brother with the energy of Brother Eyraud to start new plantations in the lands near the sea in order that help may be given to this starving people. It would be possible then to take care of all the children, made orphans by the death of their parents or by abandonment, who lead vagrant lives.

At this time, not before, there developed the gap between present and past which makes so difficult the understanding of many aspects of the Easter Island culture. The missionaries were struck by the native's lack of interest in their traditions and lack of knowledge of their history. They were surprised also to notice how little was left of the old religion and of the ancient social organization. 175 178

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to them after contact with European civilization. It is almost certain that before the coming of the white men, no reference to Easter Island existed in the native traditions of any other Polynesian island.

THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY

The small native community concentrated in the village of Hanga-roa presents today construction quite different from that which would have been observed before the collapse of the old culture. The intermixture of tribes has entirely changed the relationship of the individual to society and has abolished all ancient regulations and mutual obligations. Nowadays the only unity within the village is the biological family, whose importance has been maintained and perhaps increased since the introduction of the Catholic religion.

The present population of Hanga-roa village would be an interesting field for the study of changing culture and adaptation. Easter Islanders are the only Polynesians who have been subjected to the influence of a Spanish-speaking country. Contact with South American people has developed a type of society worthy of study and comparison with social conditions of Polynesians on other islands.

The culture pattern of Easter Island has been so greatly modified that very little information may be obtained as to the type of relationship observed in olden days. It is likely that after long contact with the natives certain tendencies which have been transmitted unaltered from pre-European times would be noticed, but these would be difficult to determine as they are not crystallized into specific institutions. They probably belong to the category of widespread attitudes observed by Polynesians in general. As most of my time on the island was spent in an attempt to reconstruct the past, I had little opportunity to study the new mode of life. So little is known of the past that it is impossible to determine whether the behavior followed by present natives is a survival of an ancient pattern or an adaptation due to changed conditions.

THE HOUSEHOLD

On Easter Island there are fifty houses for the present population of 456 natives, an average of nine persons for each house. The households include grandparents, parents and their children, brothers with their wives and children, and very often relatives or friends who are "visiting." The custom of living for an indefinite period in the home of a relative or friend is so common that it is a well-established institution. If a family is without resources, all or some of its members settle in the house of some other family. They are always welcomed and no one considers them parasites. "Visitors" usually choose a well-provided house. I found a few people who lived permanently in the homes of friends. Most of these were unmarried women with chil-

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All traditions of the seclusion of children rest on an authentic custom, the memory of which has not been entirely lost. Both De Langle (130, vol. 1, p. 81) and members of Gonzalez' expedition (90, p. 40) mention having seen huts where children were apparently secluded, guarded by adults.

FEAST HOUSE

A large house (*hare nui*) was built before a feast (*koro*) where young people gathered to play and sing. They lived in more or less promiscuity, and tradition says that they had many opportunities to make love and to have sexual intercourse. Foundations were laid for many marriages during the feast, but as evidenced by numerous tales, the feast houses were not for the young people only but for all invited guests. Routledge was told that the young people who shared in the dances had to be "white" (*ritorito*) which in Easter Island is almost synonymous with "fine." Routledge (194, p. 235) writes: "In connection with some or all of the *kaunga* (dancing grounds) there was a house where the party remained indoors for a long time previous to the dances, in order 'to get their complexions,' a touch which shows that a white skin was admired." In traditional records of *koro* some confusion may have arisen between the seclusion before the feast and the actual *koro*.

INITIATION RITES

When the children between the ages of 13 and 15 years were submitted to seclusion, rites were celebrated which had perhaps the character of a consecration. Little is known about these ceremonies, and their significance is obscure. The boys and girls who went through the ceremonies were termed *poki take* and *poki manu* (bird children). Routledge (194, p. 266) was told that the *take* ceremonies were dropped about 30 years before the arrival of the missionaries and that no living person had attended such a ceremony. The oldest man in the village when Routledge was there stated that the *take* ceremony was intended for adults and that the father performed the rites when the son was born. My information was obtained from Viriamo through Tepano. She said that boys and girls were sent to Motu-nui when they were 13 years of age. They sojourned on the island for three months, living in separate caves. Food was taken to them in canoes, and ornaments (*tahonga*, wooden balls) and special breechcloths of tapa called *hami mama* were sent them by their parents. The children were given red and white ocher (*kiea* and *marikuru*) for the painting of their bodies. White bands were painted around the arms and feet, concentric white circles on the back at the level of the waist, and two white rings on the buttocks.

The ceremony following seclusion was called *te manu mo ta poki* (the bird for the child). I could discover no better explanation of this feast and its benefit than that given by Routledge, which is vague and probably incor-

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Clubs

LONG-HANDLED CLUBS

The long club (*ua*), which is still carved on Easter Island as a curio, was both a weapon and a parade staff for chiefs. Roussel (190, p. 426) includes them among the usual weapons of the natives, but Thomson (215, p. 475) asserts that the *ua* "was carried as a bâton of office before the chiefs and used only for that purpose." Geiseler (87, p. 34) says that the *ua* were carried during walks or to meetings. I was told that they were used as badges of dignity.

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The *ua* (fig. 5, *a*) is a long staff, the cross section of which is a flattened ellipse. The upper end is decorated on both sides by bi-fronted human heads with eyes of bone and obsidian. The forehead is high and crossed by curved ridges, representing hair. The cheek bones protrude and have a crescentic form; the mouth, narrow and long, is slightly in relief. In the lobes of the ears, plugs of wood or bone are carefully indicated. The staff widens toward the distal end where it is somewhat flattened and has blunt edges. The distal end is slightly curved.

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In Bishop Museum there are two specimens of old *ua* (B3689, B3690) and 16 more modern ones. The largest *ua* in the collection is almost two meters long, but it is of recent date and shows the tendency of the islanders to exaggerate the size of their modern productions.

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Suitable pieces of wood for making *ua* were exceedingly rare on the island. This is manifest in the crookedness of many specimens. Holes or knots in the wood were painstakingly filled with small plugs cut to fit. These precious ceremonial weapons were kept in sheaths of bulrushes and were preserved as carefully as the wooden images. Two specimens of these sheaths with *ua* in them are preserved in the Peabody Museum at Cambridge.

SHORT-HANDLED CLUBS

The chief weapon for hand-to-hand fighting was a short, heavy, wooden club called *paoa*, the handle of which was carved in the form of a human head or of a lizard. The principal varieties of these clubs are illustrated in figure 6.

Tepano believed that carved wooden images of lizards (*moko*) were clubs, and to support his belief he quoted a tale in which a hero knocks down demons with a *moko*. Geiseler (87, p. 37) found an analogous tradition and states that the *moko* served principally to defend houses and to expel intruders from the door. As figures of rats or lizards were stood on either side of the door, it is possible that they were occasionally used as weapons.

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Wooden Swords

The modern natives manufacture wooden swords for trade with passing ships. No mention is made by early travelers of the use of such weapons, and

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natives for ornaments and especially for headdresses consisting of the most extraordinary things:

> Sometimes it was a hat decorated with buttons, a calabash, a half squash, or a sea bird whose carcass had been opened more or less carefully. One day I saw one of those fellows who had the funny idea of putting one bucket into another and covering his head with them. Another had found shoes left by the Peruvians. He had split them, joined them together and "shod" his head.

The immoderate fondness of the natives for headgear is well illustrated by the narratives of the first navigators who all complain about the loss of hats, which the natives coveted more than anything else. After a few hours ashore La Pérouse and his crew were hatless.

Today the Easter Islanders are still fond of headgear. Those who do not own European hats or caps of the Chilean navy, wear straw hats plaited by the women in a technique which was introduced from Tahiti about 1875. These straw hats, of European origin but adapted by the Tahitians, are made on Easter Island from narrow bands of plaited straw wound spirally and sewn together with needle and thread. They are often decorated with artificial flowers or chicken feathers. The style is the same for men and for women.

Formerly, men wore feather headdresses and women wore rush hats of a type entirely different from the modern ones. Some natives have been seen with wreaths of leaves or of dried seaweed on their heads. Even now one frequently sees a young girl with a wreath of leaves on her head worn more in fun than to adorn herself. Fifty years ago such decorations seem to have been more common. Geiseler (87, p. 35) mentions in his notes that "the young girls, besides other ornaments, wear daily green wreaths of leaves on their heads and flowers behind the ears, as in the Society Islands." A middle-aged native told me that women used to wear wreaths of sweet-smelling flowers from the *ngaoho* (*Caesalpinia bonduc*). I have seen young women plait the flowers of the *miro-tahiti* (*Melia azedarach*) and walk around proudly with heavy wreaths on their heads. The *miro-tahiti* is the only tree on the island which bears flowers that can be plucked for that purpose, and it has been introduced recently.

FEATHER HEADDRESSES

The feather headdresses of Easter Island preserved in European and American museums are of four types—circlets, diadems, crescents, and conical caps.

Circlets

Most of the early navigators who mention or describe feather headdresses refer to them as circlets, crowns, or diadems (186, p. 22; 90, p. 97; 53, vol. 1, p. 291; 15, p. 47). G. Forster (83, vol. 1, pp. 565-566) noticed that they were not all alike and he distinguished two kinds:

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scription fits rather well. The way ear plugs were inserted into the ear is well described by Roggeveen (186, p. 15):

> To understand how these supposed silver plates are fixed in the ears as ornaments one must know that the lobes of this people's ears are stretched from their youth up; and their centre is slit open, in such wise that the lesser rim of the plug, being stuck through the opening of the lobe, is then pushed on towards the thicker end, which accordingly faces towards the front, and completely stuffs the opening.

The custom of stretching the lobe of the ear lasted until the arrival of the missionaries. In 1886, Thomson (215, p. 463) saw some persons with such long ear lobes that they hung on the shoulders. In 1914, Routledge (194, p. 220) knew two or three old women with widely perforated ears. The men must have abandoned the custom before the women, for Beechey (15, p. 52) noticed that "the custom is not so general with the men as formerly." Eyraud (81, vol. 38, p. 67) regards this deformation as peculiar to the women. Yet in his youth, Tepano knew some men who had their ears mutilated; he even gave me their names. The Long-Ears probably disappeared about the end of the first half of the nineteenth century (p. 73).

Neck Ornaments

Bone Ornaments

The only conspicuous neck ornament used by both sexes in everyday life was "a flat piece of bone in the shape of a tongue, or like a laurel leaf" (83, vol. 1, p. 561). (See also 53, vol. 1, p. 291.) The natives informed Forster that this ornament, which was about 5 inches long, was made of porpoise bone (*ivi-taoraha*, fig. 27, *a*).

Shell Ornaments

Flat shells worn as ornaments round the neck are mentioned by Roggeveen (186, p. 22). Until recent times sea shells (*repu reva*), not unlike patellas, were prized ornaments. According to Geiseler (87, p. 49), these shells were suspended from cords made of hair worn round the neck; however, the cord for a shell ornament in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (VI.4936), is made of vegetable fibers; some identical shells in Bishop Museum (B3577), labeled Easter Island, are suspended by coconut-fiber cord, which makes their Easter Island origin doubtful.

> A shell pendant in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (VI.4936), is round and flat with a suspension hole near one edge. The suspension cord is attached through the hole by a half hitch knot. The shell is white with yellow lines and is 73 mm. long.
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> In Bishop Museum (fig. 27, *b*) there is a fragment of a shell pendant whose roughly oblong shape resembles the bone plate described above. It is the only known specimen of this kind.

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WOODEN IMAGES

Next to the stone statues, the most famous products of Easter Island art are the wooden images representing emaciated or decaying human beings. These figures are mentioned for the first time by G. Forster (83, vol. 1, p. 582). Since Captain Cook's expedition a great many of these images have reached museums and private collections the world over.[14] There are few works of Polynesian art which have been more widely scattered or have become more popular. The number of wooden figures from Easter Island contrasts strongly with its geographical and ethnographical importance and may be explained only as the result of active production over a long period of time. The intelligent and observant natives of Easter Island soon noted the interest that their strange carvings aroused in white visitors and realized that they might be made a source of profit. The early commercialization of their art is manifest in the poor quality of many wooden statues which were acquired on the island in the second half of the last century, at a time when the old traditions of workmanship were still alive. The pieces collected by Pierre Loti in 1871 (145, fig. 139) are decadent as are the specimens that Thomson bought fifteen years later. In 1882 (87, p. 32) there were still a few old images on the island that the natives were unwilling to sell. All the images which have been purchased on the island since that time exhibit the same clumsiness of form, the same crudeness of detail, and denote the same decadence in taste and in technical skill of native artists. Figures not carved for sale are characterized by elegance of outline and by a vigorous style. They are expressive of an art with a long tradition and they reveal the unusual talent and craftsmanship of the wood carvers.

The poor taste of visitors to the island is greatly responsible for the passing of the old art. Seamen, especially the Chileans, buy statues, not because of their interest or their beauty, but because they are funny. The natives are perfectly aware of this fact, and they now seek to make their images as ridiculous as possible. The ancient forms have been exaggerated and twisted; the images are no longer conventionalized figures but awkward caricatures. (See the images published by Knoche, 123, pp. 138, 140; figs. 171, 176-178, 182-184.) The natives believe that the bigger a statue, the more splendid it is to foreigners, hence the general tendency is to produce carvings of gigantic proportions. Several years ago an officer of the *Baquedano* bought an image which was nearly 10 feet high.

The carving of wooden images is the only regular industry of the island.

[14] Wooden images from Easter Island have been reproduced in the following publications: Routledge, 194, figs. 119-120; Lehmann, 139, figs. 1, 2, 5, 6; Karutz, 116, figs. 1-4; Bahnson, 8, vol. 1, fig. 57; Schulze-Maitzier, 199, pl. 20; Pinart, 178, pp. 239-240; Thomson, 215; pl. 50, figs. 1-3; Lavachery, 132, p. 14; Ratzel, 184, vol. 2, p. 331; Buschan, 36, vol. 2, fig. 171; Edge-Partington, 68, pls. 1-3; Shapiro, 202, Cahiers d'art, figs. 171, 176-178, 182, 184, 185, 187, 188; Chauvet, 45, figs. 115-148; Handbook to Ethnological Collection, 102, British Museum, fig. 158; Knapp, 117, p. 466.

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of the parents nor the dead child's brothers and sisters may eat the food. Juan Atan explained this taboo by saying that the *umu* was the dead man's body and, should the immediate family eat it, something bad would happen to the entire extended family. He further explained that such an *umu* must be given by the family, otherwise something terrible would happen to them.

Viewing the *umu* as part of the dead man's body may represent an adoption from the church's taking of the sacrament, yet, considering the earlier practice of cannibalism on the island, such a view may hark back to pre-Christian times.

Originally such a death feast was held on the day of death, but its celebration so irked Father Estella that some years ago he condemned the practice and the natives agreed to hold it on the day after death. It now appears that this has been further modified so that it is held on the day of burial.

STABILITY AND CHANGE

The information reported here is admittedly incomplete. Be this as it may, the data, when compared with Métraux's account of ancient life cycle customs on Easter Island, shows a surprising number of carry-overs into modern times.[7] In the course of our work we have also gathered heretofore unreported information on Rapa-nui customs which seem to be indigenous and of some antiquity, notably the delicate situation of the first born son and his relationship with his father, and the position of authority of the parents-in-law of a married couple.

The foremost changes in the life-cycle segment of the social pattern are to be noted in that sector which would most interest the church. Since the Catholic church represents the earliest and most prolonged actively acculturating influence on the island, this is wholly expectable. In the realm of marriage, for example, the church has been included, rather than substituted, in that to the simple rite of marriage involving consent of both families, gift exchange, and marriage feast, the church ritual has been added. Interestingly enough, the church appears to have had little effect upon the indigenous concept of divorce which, until very recently, continued to be an unceremonious splitting up of a husband and wife relationship upon the slightest provocation. Here, however, the government has stepped in and, through attempted Naval enforcement of Chilean divorce laws, has introduced a change in the native idea of divorce to where it now involves the factors of blame and division of community property. For those who have not yet accepted this foreign concept, the old method of divorce has met with such troublesome difficul-

7 Alfred Métraux, *Ethnology of Easter Island* (Bulletin 160, Bernice P. Bishop Museum, pp. 101-119, Honolulu, 1940).

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ties from the island's administrators that its incidence in the past few years is said to have dropped noticeably.

It is in the matter of death and burial ritual that the church has shown a strong influence amounting to almost complete substitution of foreign for indigenous custom. However, the ancient feast formerly held on the day of death continues to be celebrated, along with the enforcement of certain eating taboos on the members of the deceased's family. The only influence the church has had on this celebration is to change its time to the day of burial. Whereas most of the natives are now seemingly content to have their deceased relatives go through the church ritual and be buried in the Catholic cemetery, I gathered a number of contemporary accounts of elderly men who, becoming ill, have gone to a secret cave to die. During our visit one old man became sick and disappeared from the village for almost two weeks. Since he worked for the sheep ranch, the administration attempted to find out where he had gone and what had happened to him. Considerable questioning brought forth the same answer, that the old man believed he was about to die and had probably gone to his secret cave.[8] In time he returned, well and healthy, but remained completely vague as to where he had been during his absence. As for the burial of the dead in ancient *ahus*, a secretly practiced custom in 1880,[9] I could learn nothing and, from all indications, this practice has ceased.

Beside the government's influence in lowering the incidence of divorce, it has been responsible in no small degree for a certain amount of change in the early sector of the life cycle. Thus, with the presence of a Naval-controlled hospital, doctor, and midwife, it must be presumed that much of the ancient practice surrounding the delivery of a baby, including the method of tying and severing the umbilical cord, has given way to more modern medical practices. However, it is interesting to note that the early custom of smearing red ocher into the umbilical wound continues up to the present time, along with the ceremonial *umu* given by the father's family to that of the mother, and at which time the mother must still eat the first food.[10] In this connection it should be noted that, while Métraux refers to this *umu* as a feast, my own informants seemed to regard it more as a ceremonial partaking of food.[11] That such may be the case is further strengthened by their description of an immediately following feast for friends and relatives in celebration of the first born child. The latter is not recorded by Métraux and

8 For an unsuccessful attempt at self-interment in a secret cave in 1922, see P. Sebastián Englert, *La Tierra de Hotu Matu'a* (Santiago, 1948), p. 52.

9 Métraux, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

10 *Idem*, pp. 102-103.

11 *Idem*, p. 103.

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may constitute an innovation. However, it is so typically Rapa-nui in character, even including the interchange of food by the two families involved, that, if it is not old, it certainly represents a change from within the indigenous cultural pattern. That this feast is now breaking down and being supplanted by a European-like party is indicated by Jorge Tepano's plans for the celebration of the birth of a first child to one of his sons. However, the exchange feature continues, although gifts other than food are now beginning to be used.

Of perhaps greater significance is the change being wrought by the local government school, not only via the forced introduction of Spanish, mathematics, and the like, but, indirectly, on the life habits of the adolescent. Not only are the initiation rites of puberty no longer carried out — nor have they been for some time — but the ancient attitude that young men up to the age of marriage should devote their time to pleasurable living has undergone a noticeable modification. It is possible that in this we have an influence from Chile, in that on the continent, which natives have been allowed to visit from time to time, a boy completes his education and goes to work. Although the age for such activity in Chile may be a bit later than on Easter Island, owing to more extensive education, the fact that the island's schooling is completed for a boy at age thirteen may account for the islander's new attitude that this period marks the beginning of work for their youth.

Having noted some of the more important acculturation changes in the life cycle of the Easter Islander, we may now turn briefly to some of the correspondences with ancient custom as determined from Métraux's attempted reconstruction of the culture of the past.

Although the *umu* feast on the third or fifth month of pregnancy appears to have been dropped, the *umu* at the birth of a first child, with its rite of first food for the mother, continues.[12] Whereas the adolescent no longer goes through a puberty rite, and must now engage in a certain amount of work, his earlier freedom of sex life continues unabated. Marriage, including the gift exchange and marriage feast, continues substantially as Métraux described it for the past,[13] except for the inclusion of church ritual and an unexplained, though minor, change in the manner of exhibiting the exchanged gifts. Here Métraux describes a conical framework of poles upon which the items were exhibited, while during my stay on the island I heard numerous references to the gifts being displayed in such a way that they formed a boat.[14]

Of special interest is the continued existence of the *tumu* grouping of lineages,

12 *Idem*, pp. 101, 103.
13 *Idem*, p. 111.
14 *Loc. cit.*

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178 and the *koro* feast which Métraux believed to have probably died out.[15] Our description is that of the *koro* given by a man to his father-in-law which took place in Hangaroa in February, 1956. In the matter of divorce we have noted that there is now a tendency to follow Chilean legal procedure, though simple separation following the ancient pattern continues to exist. In the matter of death and burial a few old men would appear to still hold out for non-Christian interment by the expedient of going to secret caves when they believe they are about to die.

Narrow as this study has been in terms of the total culture pattern of the Easter [114] Islanders, it tends to reveal that far more of the ancient social customs continue to exist than was previously thought by Métraux and others.[16] How much more [648] of the old culture may yet survive is difficult to say, for the Rapa-nui is sensitive to the criticism and derision of his Chilean administrators who have tended to look upon most of his customs as child-like and foolish. The result has been a tendency on the part of the islander to publicly depreciate the role that ancient customs play in his life.

Museum of New Mexico
Santa Fe, New Mexico

15 *Idem*, p. 346.

16 *Idem*, p. 57.

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ments and works of art. His idea was that since I had books and photographs showing the designs and he had the manual skill we might form an ideal, not to say a profitable, partnership. I must confess that on several occasions the islanders' skillful imitations completely deceived me, and I thus acquired a beautiful collection of ancient stone hooks that I only gradually realized were modern copies.

This continued practice of the traditional arts has a certain historical bearing. It suggests that there has never been a complete breach in Easter Island civilization and that the present natives, however mixed in blood they may be, are, nevertheless, the successors in direct line of the unknown men who carved the old wooden images that are nowadays prized specimens in our museums.

Unfortunately, this is not the only old custom which has survived. From the time when the Dutch discovered the island to the present, its people have had the reputation of being the cleverest thieves in the South Seas, and quite rightly. This complaint is repeated in all the accounts of the early navigators, and many of the dramatic incidents on the beach of Hangaroa have arisen from the natives' brazen contempt for the sanctity of private property. Only the sensitive and elegant French explorer La Pérouse adopted the policy of laughing at such pilfering, and paid no further attention to it. He and his men were amused by the attitude of the native women who helped their mates pick pockets by distracting the attention of innocent victims through entreaties and "ludicrous gestures."

The natives of our day are just as thievish as their forefathers, and this wayward disposition is the cause of endless troubles for the English company which has leased the island from the Chilean Government for sheep raising. To prevent constant stealing of the sheep the company put barbed wire across the island in an attempt to force the people to remain within the bounds of their village. But such drastic measures were of little avail, and in the year I spent there 3,000 sheep disappeared. Though the culprits are known to the whole community, family loyalty protects them and makes investigation useless.

Otherwise the natives are law-abiding and peaceful; there are very few records of murder or bloody violence among them. The only criminal we heard of was one of our guides, who, ironically enough, proved to be about the only honest man on the island.

The people live as they did in the past, on the produce of their fields. Taros, sweetpotatoes, yams, bananas, and sugarcane grow abundantly on the fertile volcanic soil. The only wants they cannot supply themselves are for manufactured goods such as soap. And they like especially to get foreign clothing. In this matter, the men

4:Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1945
OY2 Easter Island OY2

do well for themselves by barter with the white sailors who visit the island, but the women cannot be so provided for. They complain bitterly of the difficulty they have in satisfying their coquettish taste.

For an anthropologist, the material on Easter Island is rather scant. The old culture has nearly gone. No Westerner ever saw it while it was still functioning. The data on the past, which can be gathered, are limited to statements or tales which a few people have heard from fathers or grandfathers. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find a relatively rich folklore, which helped me to understand many aspects of the ancient civilization. Both legends and anecdotes stress cannibalism, which seems to have haunted the imagination of the Easter Islanders before the arrival of Christianity.

Those who expect to find in these traditions any evidence for the existence of a civilization previous to that of the Polynesians will be sadly disappointed. There is not a single feature of the Easter Island lore that does not point toward Polynesian origin. The language itself is pure Polynesian, and no words now in use hint of a legacy from any other linguistic stock.

These are the main facts to bear in mind as we turn to the problem posed by the mysterious gigantic statues and the inscribed tablets. But before we go into it, we must first consider what is to be said of the theory that the island is a peak of a sunken continent, since upon this assumption the classic interpretation of its mysteries has for a long time rested. There is no scientific evidence that Easter Island is the wreckage of such a sunken continent—Lemuria or Atlantis. It is plainly a typical volcanic island of recent origin, formed by a series of eruptions originating on the floor of the ocean. Soundings have revealed a depth of 1,770 fathoms 20 miles from its coast. Moreover, when the island was settled by Polynesian migrants it does not seem to have been much more extensive than it is now. Its coasts are subjected to continual erosion from the waves, and it is true that during the last decades a few of the monuments which once stood on the top of a high cliff have been precipitated into the sea. But since the ancient sanctuaries were erected along the shore, if the erosion had been very great, all of them would have been washed away by now. There has also been a question about a great road which, it is said, ran to the shore of the island and continued under water, suggesting that the shore was once much farther out. The famous French writer, Pierre Loti, was, if I am not mistaken, the first to mention this "triumphal avenue," which he thought would lead to the heart of the mystery. On a simple statement of this traveling poet visions of submerged glory have been based, and many good minds have allowed their imaginations to follow the submarine road down to enchanted palaces. The truth is that no such road exists. What Loti took for

10: Cooke D-5 (1886) 1899
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

593 586 of injuries inflicted by her husband in a moment of blind rage over some grievance, fancied or real. In this connection it may be mentioned that subsequently this same woman went to nurse Pakomeo, previously mentioned, who was ill at the time. Upon the recovery, so well pleased were they with each other that she abandoned her cruel spouse, remained with Pakomeo, was living with him as his wife at the time of our visit, and the arrangement seemed mutually satisfactory.

304 [178] The custom of tattooing has fallen off within the last few years and is now rarely or never practiced. It is only among the adults, more especially among the older people, that good examples may be found. Unless the inhabitants of other islands, where a standard pattern is adhered to, the Rapa Nuiis seem to have affected no uniform fashion nor limited themselves to any particular style. The custom obtained alike among the male and female members of the community. Generally speaking, the ornamentation was as follows: A narrow band around the upper part of the forehead, at the edge of the roots of the hair, with little balls, each joined to the band by a stem, pendant from it, the whole simulating a coronet; a line around the outer free edge, the helix, and lobe of the ear; a line around the edge of the lips; the neck in its entire circumference, either in straight lines, vertical or oblique, or with the lines wavy; three radiating exclamation marks beneath each ear, common among women at the present day; a girdle about the waist, in broad bands, with an attempt at lace work, or fringe, from which rise heavy lines, at the ends of which, toward the axillæ, are fanciful figures resembling faces, with a larger face in the middle of the back; fine lines down the thighs anteriorly; heavy, undulating bands posteriorly, running over the buttocks toward the waist; wavy or straight perpendicular lines, terminating in points, around the legs, and elsewhere.

[386 824] The material used in tattooing is made of the soot obtained by burning a plant with a leaf similar to our Indian corn, and called by the natives *ti*, moistened with the expressed juice of a berry similar to our pokeberry, and called *poporo*. Pieces of bone, finished like a fine-toothed comb, or fish bones made fast to a short stick, are used to prick the skin by holding in contact with the surface and striking it a brisk blow.

291 [386] Before the advent of the missionaries the Rapa Nuiis possessed scant wardrobes. They made a course cloth woven of the fibers of the inner bark of the *mahuti*, Chinese paper mulberry, or of the *burau*, another fibrous tree, which they wore about the shoulders and loins. This cloth [714 411] was also used, in the manner of a shield, as a protection in battle against the enemy's spears, which latter was, with the exception of the war club, their principal weapon, the head being made of obsidian, numbers of which may be found on the island. They also made siapu, or tapa, as [287] do the natives of other islands, by beating out the bark and wearing the same as a breechcloth. With the coming of the missionaries civilized clothing was introduced and is now generally worn, comprising coat, 291 177 shirt and trousers, among the men, and a loose gown of cotton mate-

13: Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1917
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

told "Kaho ki te hiva," "Go to the world outside"; there was no objection to eating the young birds. The tara departed from Motu Nui about March, but a few stragglers remained; we saw one bird and obtained eggs at the beginning of July, but the natives failed to get any for us in August. When in the following spring the new Bird-man had achieved his egg, he brought it to Orohié and was given the old one which he buried in a gourd in a cranny of Rano Raraku; he then took the place of his predecessor, who returned to his ordinary life.

While the foregoing may be described as the accepted procedure in connection with the finding of the first egg, it must not, as will readily be understood, be regarded as absolutely fixed and unvarying—the ceremonial of even an English Coronation is subject to alteration. Also before the end the cult admittedly degenerated and residence at Orongo was abandoned. Some years the race was a "walk over" for one man, the remaining competitors having been squared; on other occasions the finders of further eggs in the hunt beside the absolute first one were allowed to count as bird-men.[1] In this last case the year was said, in answer to a question, to be known by the name of the name of the first finder, all the eggs being finally disposed of in one gourd. It was very definitely volunteered that this plurality was a late development, that originally there was only one bird-man each year. When there were thus several winners one hopu used sometimes to act for more than one employer; a single employer also might have more than one hopu. The fourth year before the final end seems to have been very much "go as you please," for four clans took part and there were ten winners; two hopu had two employers each, and three bird-men took their own eggs, one also acting for another man. With regard to the disposal of the egg one old man said that it was not

[1] This accounts for the large number of bird-men still surviving, see above.

13: Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1917
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

always hidden in a hole; it might be thrown into the sea or kept and buried with the bird-man. The place of residence for the taboo period was also subject to variation. Orohié was mentioned with pre-eminence, but there were other bird-houses on the Raraku slope and one on the adjoining ahu of Tongariki, some used more particularly when there was more than one bird-man; it transpired also that it was permissible for a man to remain in his own place though he could not stay in his own dwelling; in most of the larger settlements, which would be those with important image ahus, there was a house specially appointed for the residence of the local bird-man should he so elect, but this may have been a later development. The bird-men of the Western clans had a special Mecca in Anakena on the north coast, where the annual inspection of the tablets took place, and an adjoining spot; they went there in all the cases which could be quoted, with the exception of two or three who took up their abode at Raraku, but it was said by three authorities that these places were only resorted to when there was war between the clans and the western men dared not venture into the eastern territory of Orohié. It is a tempting surmise that the quarries and statues inside the Raraku crater, which is entered by a road from the west, may have been associated originally with the Western clans, and those outside the mountain with the Eastern. If so it is not improbable that, owing to internicine war, the work in the crater was suspended first, which would account for the much smaller number of completed statues found inside the crater.[1]

The last year which the Ao went to Orongo, which is known as "Rokunga," appears to have been 1866 or 1867. The names of twelve subsequent years are given during

[1] Thirty statues have been erected inside the crater against some fifty-five outside, exclusive of those around the base, which appear to have formed the approach.

14: Routledge E-5 (1914-1915) 1917
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

yards for a distance of some six miles, and must have produced an imposing effect. We never found a statue of which we could definitely say that it was in process of removal, and we have no light to throw on the means employed, beyond the fact that graded roads have been made.

We trust that the result of our archæological work will be to give a reasonably full and complete survey of the remains as they at present exist on Easter Island. Another channel was open to us, in studying the history of the island, namely, Ethnological Research. No hope had been held out to us before leaving England that anything of value could be obtained from the existing natives. It came therefore as a surprise to find that there was still much of interest to be learned from the old inhabitants. Ten years ago more could have been learnt; ten years hence practically nothing will remain.

It must be borne in mind that in dealing with the history of Easter Island we have three periods to consider. Firstly prehistoric times whose story it is desired to decipher; secondly a period of one hundred and fifty years dating from the first discovery of the island, during which time ships touched at intervals and have left a certain amount of record of what they found; and thirdly the present period of European occupation. Between the two last periods there is a great break. In 1863 certain slave raiders from Peru carried off half the population, including most of the principal men. In 1864 Roman Catholic missionaries landed, and speedily converted the remaining natives to Christianity. Old customs died out; old tradition was despised. Only those, therefore, who could remember native life prior to 1863 or 1864 could give any assistance. There were on our landing some twelve old people who came into this category; but even so the difficulties in the pursuit of knowledge were very great. It would not, as will readily be understood, be an easy matter to reconstruct English life of fifty years ago merely from the accounts of old people. The Polynesians are in addition notoriously inexact in their statements. They frequently do not themselves know when they are speaking the truth and when they are relying on imagination. Each witness had therefore to be cross-examined carefully but without any doubt being thrown on his story, which would immediately have given offence. Then some weeks later he was discreetly re-examined, when he had forgotten his previous evidence, and his account compared with those of others. The statements which follow have been thus very carefully verified; but there is much in addition on which information was sought but on which it is impossible to speak with certainty or even to speak at all.

The first question which naturally arises is with regard to Tradition, "Do the present inhabitants know anything of the origin of the great works?" To this, speaking generally, the answer is in the negative. They take the statues for granted, and they are of no particular interest to them. One boy inquired with the pity akin to contempt, "Have you